

Progress Report for ACS Information Fluency Project Grant 2001

Rollout of Specialized Instructional Software in a Liberal Arts Institution University of Richmond

Our grant was intended to: 1) allow us to meet with experts from Washington & Lee to discuss the details of rolling out GIS software across the disciplines, 2) meet with our own faculty to assess their interest and needs for GIS, and 3) develop a comprehensive training and support plan for the rollout of GIS software. We have made a good deal of progress on these objectives and what we have learned has opened up new challenges for us.

We began the process by holding a day-long meeting on May 25th of interested faculty, librarians, and technology support staff, joined by Hugh Blackmer from Washington & Lee. Hugh shared with us the types of projects occurring at W&L and our faculty discussed their ideas for using GIS in their classes and across their curricula. Hugh helped our faculty to better understand how GIS could be utilized most appropriately in the various disciplines.

Over the summer, we at Richmond began to identify the librarians and technical support staff that would work most closely with GIS and developed a plan for their training. We also incorporated the GIS software, ArcView, as a component of our standard software load to ensure that faculty could use GIS in their courses and students would have access in computer labs and the library.

On August 16th, Hugh Blackmer returned with two of his W&L colleagues to continue our education. Again, Richmond faculty, librarians, and technology support staff attended the meeting. The focus of this meeting was support - what is truly needed in terms of machines, server capacity, and expertise with the software and in data manipulation to allow faculty to properly incorporate GIS into their courses. At the end of this meeting, we had a new appreciation for the commitment on the part of library and technology staff that was going to be necessary to perform a full campus rollout.

These meetings have, quite honestly, led us to rethink our premise of a full campus rollout in AY 2001. We are presently working with just a few faculty this academic year as we learn more and test our own systems. We are also actively looking for funding sources that would help us to add a full-time GIS support person, thereby allowing us to perform a full campus rollout next AY and have any hope of being successful.

The conversations between W&L and Richmond have also led to the ACS Environmental Studies Program providing support for a meeting that will be held at Richmond on November 9th and 10th with other ACS institutions interested in GIS. At this meeting, we will be exploring the possibility of putting together a large grant proposal to help all of us move forward with the incorporation of GIS across many disciplines.

The opportunity to meet as a group and to learn from W&L has helped us to better understand the challenges we face. We have begun to have an appreciation for the level of expertise that will be needed in our faculty, librarians, and technical staff to be successful with this implementation. Regardless of the instructional software being considered, this grant has helped us to remember that "the devil is in the details".

Pat Schoknecht
pschokne@richmond.edu
Oct. 14, 2001